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### XXIII.—SPENSER AND THE EARL OF LEICESTER.

The most critical year in the life of Spenser was that extending from the summer of 1579, when he was preparing for the publication of the *Shepheards Calender*, to the summer of 1580, when he went to Ireland as the secretary of Lord Grey. The epistle to Harvey, prefixed to the *Calender*, was dated “from my lodging at London thys 10. of April, 1579”; but the book was not published until some time in the following winter. Besides this, his first ambitious work, Spenser had various other literary undertakings in hand, including a first draft of the great epic. By the tenth of April, 1580, he was anxious to have Harvey’s judgment on the *Faerie Queene*, and on the twelfth of August he landed in Ireland.

The most important document bearing on this period is the letter to Harvey dated October fifth.<sup>1</sup> This letter has been frequently cited for its discussion of reformed versifying; but the real significance has, I believe, been strangely overlooked. It is true that much space is given to telling about the Areopagus, and there are some specimens of Spenser’s lamentable essays in the new versification; but these are merely incidental to his real purpose, which was to ask Harvey’s advice on some matters on which he was in doubt. “My principal doubts are these,” he says. “First, I was minded for a while to have intermitted the uttering of my writings; leaste by over-much cloying their noble eares, I should gather a contempt of myself, or else seeme rather for gaine and commoditie to doe it, for some sweetnesse that I have already tasted. Then also, me seemeth, the work too base for his excellent Lordship, being made in

<sup>1</sup> Harvey’s *Works*, ed. Grosart, I, pp. 6 ff.

Honour of a private Personage unknowne, which of some yl-willers might be upbraided, not to be so worthie, as you know she is: or the matter not so weightie, that it should be offred to so weightie a Personage; or the like."

That this passage refers to the *Calender*, and that Spenser was considering a dedication to Leicester, there can be no doubt. The "private Personage unknowne," who, though "worthie," is yet celebrated in the "base" style of a pastoral, is certainly Rosalind. The facts that the prefatory letter to Harvey was dated April tenth, and that when the *Calender* appeared it was dedicated to Sidney, offer no difficulties. By October, Spenser had been received with so much favor by Leicester that he contemplated offering his poem to the powerful favorite, and sought Harvey's advice. This is the real occasion for his letter. It is also in this same letter that Spenser speaks of Gosson's impudent dedication of the *School of Abuse* to Sidney, "being for his labour scorned"; he continues, "Suche follie is it, not to regarde aforehand the inclination and qualitie of him to whome wee dedicate oure Bookes. Suche mighte I happily incurre entituling *My Slomber* and the other Pamphlets unto his honor. I meant them rather to Maister Dyer."

There is yet more of importance in this letter. Spenser speaks of his intimacy with Sidney,<sup>1</sup> and proceeds: "Your desire to heare of my late beeing with her Maiestie, muste dye in it selfe. As for the twoo worthy Gentlemen, Master Sidney and Master Dyer, they have me, I thanke them, in some use of familiarity." And near the end, after asking Harvey to write the news when Spenser has gone abroad, he continues, "As gentle M. Sidney, I thanke his good Worship, hath required of me, and so promised to doe againe."<sup>2</sup>

Thus far it is evident that Spenser was elated over his

<sup>1</sup> P. 7.

<sup>2</sup> P. 17.

relations with Leicester, Sidney, and Dyer: that he was proceeding with caution, though inclined to dedicate the *Calender* to Leicester, because fearful of presuming as Gosson had presumed with Sidney; and that his present position was of such importance that he had been sent to the Queen on confidential business. But the most significant passage is that in which he shows that even literature is of secondary importance:

“I was minded also to have sent you some English verses: or Rymes, for a farewell: but by my Troth, I have no spare time in the world, to thinke on such Toyes, that you know will demaund a freer head, than mine is presently. I beseech you by all your Curtesies and Graces let me be answered ere I goe: which will be, (I hope, I feare, I thinke) the nexte weeke, if I can be dispatched of my Lorde. I goe thither, as sent by him, and maintained most what of him; and there am to employ my time, my body, my minde, to his Honours service.”<sup>1</sup>

The true significance of this letter consists not in its discussion of Areopagus and reformed versifying, or even in the list of poems which Spenser had ready for publication, but rather in the tone of hope, in the sense of his having established important relations with men who could advance him, in the extreme caution naturally felt by a young man who does not wish to make a nuisance of himself; in short, in the very clear impression which it gives that, for the

<sup>1</sup> P. 16. Spenser also (p. 7) advises Harvey to look out for preferment for himself: “And indeede for your self to, it sitteth with you now, to call your wits and senses togither . . . when occasion is so fairely offered of Estimation and Preferment. For, whiles the yron is hote, it is good striking, and minds of Nobles varie, as their Estates.” Harvey’s reply, dated Oct. 23, chaffs Spenser on this business-like manner and wagers all the books in his study that Spenser will not go over sea by next week or the week after. Harvey was evidently skeptical of his friend’s enthusiasm.

moment at least, his head was full of more important matters than verse-making, and that his poetry was mainly valuable as a means to worldly preferment.

If we turn, now, to the third of these "Three Proper and wittie familiar letters," dated in April, 1580,<sup>1</sup> the change in tone is marked. The letter is purely literary. Spenser treats of quantity and accent, giving illustrations; seeks to compare Harvey's theories with Drant's; speaks of his literary undertakings, naming several poems. Evidently Harvey's prophecy had come true: something had occurred to turn the poet back to his visions and his books. In August he was in Ireland, beginning the long period of exile, and deprived of his hopes of rising in the councils of state. I wish to stress these points, even at the expense of repetition: In October, Spenser was at Leicester House, intimate with the powerful group of men about the great earl, confident of preferment; by the following April, he had turned once more to literature. In August he was in Ireland, the dream over. I propose now to offer an explanation of these circumstances.

## I.

Before I discuss the possible relations of two important poems to this passage in Spenser's life, it is necessary to treat briefly the crisis which confronted Leicester in 1579-80. At no other time in the history of this most powerful of Elizabeth's favorites was he engaged in such a battle as confronted him when the queen seemed about to marry the due d'Alençon. Not even the critical period 1585-86, when Leicester aroused the fury of his mistress by assuming the lordship of the States, can compare with this; for in 1585 he had given up all hopes of ever becoming the king-

<sup>1</sup> Harvey, *Works*, I, pp. 29 ff. The second letter is by Harvey.

consort. In 1579, it is very certain, such hopes still remained.

Early in 1579, the Queen's marriage with Alençon again seemed imminent. Jehan de Simier, master of the wardrobe for the duke, arrived early in January, and at once became the favorite of the Queen. He is described as "a consummate courtier, steeped in the dissolute gallantry of the French Court." His correspondence with the Queen is of a frankness, an intimacy, which is astonishing, even for the times. Elizabeth had already had experiences of a tender nature with La Mole (1570), an earlier ambassador, but La Mole was an amateur in love-making in comparison with the artful Simier. He at once became her "monkey." In February, Talbot writes of her continued "very good usage of Monsieur Simier and all his company," and says "she is the best disposed and pleasantest . . . that is possible."<sup>1</sup> Castelnau writes to Catherine that not a day passes that the Queen fails to send for him, or to visit him, at times before he is dressed; "those who are against it are cursing him, and declare that Simier will cheat her, and has bewitched her."<sup>2</sup> Leicester became violently jealous, and endeavored to prevent the Queen from signing the passports for the coming of Alençon at the end of June, but he was defeated by Simier. In August, the prince came, and from the first day was the Queen's "frog." Alençon, being not less expert in love-making than La Mole and Simier, was in the highest favor, and the Queen seemed completely bewitched, while the Puritan pulpits fulminated in vain against the unholy alliance, and Elizabeth's subjects talked of love philtres and black art as the secret of the hold the two Frenchmen had obtained. But the crisis came in October. From the second

<sup>1</sup> Nares, *Memoir of Burghley*, III, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> Hume, *Courtships of Queen Elizabeth*, pp. 207, 208.

to the eighth of that month, the Queen's council met daily. At length the final responsibility was left to Elizabeth. She wept, railed at her faithful servants, exiled some of them; even her faithful "sheep," Hatton, was in disgrace. Stubbs's book, "The discovery of a gaping gulph, whereunto England is like to be swallowed by another French marriage, if the Lord forbid not the banns, by letting her Majesty see the sin and punishment thereof," discloses the temper of the people, though the daring author was disgraced and lost his right hand. The clergy were put under restraint by a proclamation. Only Sidney dared to protest directly to her Majesty, and his frank and manly letter reflects credit on him.<sup>1</sup>

It is beside our purpose to enter into a complete discussion of this complicated intrigue. Probably the real crisis in the Queen's mind was passed by the time Simier left, in November. But that she was on the very verge of marriage and that her heart was deeply affected, there can be no doubt. The next year the affair came up at intervals, reaching the second crisis in November, 1581, when the Queen publicly kissed Alençon and told her friends that he was to be her husband. Without doubt, her council believed her, excepting Burghley, who by this time saw clearly the game she was playing, and possibly Leicester. In the case of the earl, however, his own love for the Queen, not yet dead, led him to distrust her, and he showed his mad jealousy at times by secluding himself, at other times by conniving at the assassination of Simier, and at times even by plotting with the Spanish ambassador to make the match impossible.

Outwardly the relations of Burghley and Leicester were friendly. Still, we must remember that the Queen would

<sup>1</sup>This letter was written in January, 1580. Sidney was excluded from the royal presence for a time, as a punishment.

have married Leicester long before if the great treasurer had not prevented. That the earl knew this, one feels certain. As was his custom, Burghley sought to gain his ends by keeping in the background. I find it very difficult to determine his real attitude toward the marriage. As an Englishman, with Puritan leanings, he probably detested the idea as much as any one could. But he saw more clearly than others the extreme danger of England's position. Mary of Scotland was a source of alarm; if the Catholic powers joined to put her on the throne, Elizabeth was lost. One must confess that Burghley was actuated by far-seeing motives, while Leicester was impetuous, short-sighted, selfish. One is also quite sure, on reading the reports of council meetings and studying with care those very interesting tables which Burghley was in the habit of drawing up, that to Leicester, Sidney, Hatton, Walsingham and others, Burghley seemed in favor of the marriage. His action was fox-like. Probably he hoped the game might shape itself so that the Queen might avoid the marriage; certainly he carefully avoided closing the negotiations, but rather helped the Queen to keep her suitor, and of course her followers, in perpetual hot water.<sup>1</sup> One who reads these

<sup>1</sup> Burghley's famous letter to the Queen, under date of 28 Jan., 1580, is in *Hatfield House Records*, II, pp. 308-310. In it he states that he had favored the marriage as one that would make for her honor and safety and enable her to "rule the Sternes of the shippes of Europe with more fame than ever came to any Quene of the Wordell." Now that the negotiations are off, it is his duty to point out the dangers of Elizabeth's position with reference to the Powers, and to suggest ways and means. He then gives an alarming list of dangers, proposing some measures which, he confesses, are but "shews of remedies," "whereas her marriage, if she had liked it, myght have provided her more surety with less peril." If we take all this literally, it reveals that Burghley actually favored the marriage. But the man was as crafty as Elizabeth herself, and we cannot be sure that this is not mere rhetoric, delivered after he felt that the real danger was past. That the court, however, believed Burghley to favor the match, I think there is not the smallest doubt.

records constantly feels that Leicester was, with reason, suspicious of Burghley, while Burghley, in turn, realized that the powerful earl was a dangerous adversary.

As to Leicester himself, he blew hot and cold. At times he openly favored the negotiations. At these moments he appears to have been sure that it was all a drama, that Elizabeth would find a way out. But of his personal jealousy of Alençon and Simier, especially of the latter, there is no doubt. It was in August of 1579, after an attempt to kill Simier had failed, that Simier launched his thunderbolt by revealing Leicester's marriage. As is well known, it was always dangerous to tell the Queen of the marriage of one of her favorites. She liked to be surrounded by a circle of tame animals. Her rage knew no bounds; the earl came near losing his life, and he had no cause to love Simier.<sup>1</sup>

## II.

We have now to consider an extraordinary characteristic of Elizabeth's relations to her followers, which will help to explain Spenser's connection with the whole intrigue. It was a whimsical custom with the Queen to give her admirers the names of animals. Thus, Simier was her "ape"; Alençon, her "frog"; Hatton, her "sheep." Leicester seems to have been known as the "lion" or the "bear"; more frequently he was her "sweet Robin." Other names were "spirit" or "leviathan," for Burghley; "dromedary," for Egerton; "boar," for Oxford; "Moor," for Walsingham. The letters of the time are filled with illustrations of these and other pet names. With his usual adaptiveness,

<sup>1</sup> In a letter of 29 Jan., 1580, Simier begs Elizabeth to protect him from the fury of the bear: "qu'il vous playse le conserver de la pate de l'ours" (*Hatfield House*, II, p. 311). This seems to refer to the quarrel with Leicester.

Simier not only rejoiced in his name of "singe," but devised a code for use in his correspondence with the Queen. By this code, the king of France was known as "Jupiter" or "Mars" or "Mercure"; Elizabeth was "le soleil," "la perle," "le diaman"; the king of Spain was "la ronse" or "Vulcan"; Orange was "le guanon" or "le pigeon"; Montmorency was "le faucon"; Casimer, "le corbeau" or "l'estourneau"; Biron, "le renard"; Bellegard, "le grifon"; Matignon, "la perdris"; Anjou, "le loryer" or "l'olivier"; and the Queen of Navarre was "la lune," "la rose," "le rubis."<sup>1</sup> One cannot be sure how widely known these code-names were; probably Burghley and Leicester knew them; but the point which I wish to stress is that the custom of using animal names was highly characteristic. Even more interesting is Simier's constant use of such phrases as "nonbre de vos bestes." Perhaps as significant an example as any is in a letter which seems to beg the Queen to protect him from the fury of Leicester: "Je vous requiers & vous suplye très-humblement que le singe soit toujours continué au nonbre de vos bestes, & qu'il vous playse le conserver de la pate de l'ours."<sup>2</sup> In another letter he writes, "Je ne vous dis pas cela sans cause, vous suplyent très humblement, Madame, me continuer de vos faveurs autant que la moindre de vos bestes, & la plus affectionée de toutes le peut méritez; vous assurent que je ne veus conserver la vye de vostre singe que pour vous en fere ung sacrifice."<sup>3</sup> A third example, from a letter of the same period: "J'ay prins ung peu de courage, et ayant overt vos deulx lectres qu'il vous a pleu m'escripre, je recogneu à mon grand regret que vostre maté avoit quelque mescontantement de seluy qui ne veut et

<sup>1</sup> The complete code is in *Hatfield House*, II, p. 448.

<sup>2</sup> 29 January, 1579-80 (*Hatfield House*, II, p. 311, no. 813).

<sup>3</sup> 25 February, 1579-80 (*ibid.*, p. 314, no. 822).

ne peut vivre ung car d'eure s'il ne se voit continuer au nonbre de vos bestes, et en la qualité de singe, puis qu'il vous a pleu ainsi le noumer.”<sup>1</sup> And again: “Asures vous sur la foy d'un singe, la plus fidelle de vos bestes, que vostre grenoule se nourrit d'espérance qu'il a que vos envoyes bien tost guérir les commiseres, pour mestre la fin qu'il désire” etc.<sup>2</sup>

Instances might be multiplied indefinitely. Catherine de Medici is called, repeatedly, “Mad. de la Serpente.”<sup>3</sup> Simier is constantly calling himself the Queen's “pauvre singe”; Alençon thanks her for good offices of which he hears from “nostre singe”;<sup>4</sup> the ape prostrates himself before her, “car je suis vostre singe, et vous estes mon créateur, mon deffançeur, mon adjuteur, et mon sauveur,” etc.;<sup>5</sup> the “frog” cannot sleep for weeping and sighing, and the “monkey” takes the liberty of humbly kissing her lovely hands.

These, then, are the conditions in this strange year 1579-80. The Queen, madly infatuated with her “ape” and her “frog,” adepts in love-making and compliment mongering, is in danger of letting her affections run away with her judgment. Burghley is thought by court and country to favor the match, while Leicester, madly jealous, yet fearful, blows hot and cold. But Leicester is the leader of the Puritan party, and the Puritans are panic-stricken at the danger. All the old hatred of the French “Monsieurs Youths” blazes out; contempt for their effeminate gallantry, for their subtlety, for their skill in making love.

<sup>1</sup> *Hatfield House*, II, p. 318 (no. 833).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 283, no. 783 (Dec. 29, 1579).

<sup>3</sup> *E. g.*, *Hatfield House*, II, p. 30 (no. 89).

<sup>4</sup> *Hatfield House*, II, p. 355.

<sup>5</sup> *Hatfield House*, II, pp. 349-352 (no. 902).

But Elizabeth, strange compound of statecraft, cunning, and mere woman, is happy. She adds the ape and the frog to the "number of her beasts," and they carry the affectation much farther. The court circle is made up of lions, apes, frogs, partridges, dromedaries, and all the rest of *Æsop*.

Near this charmed circle of the English Circe, but not yet of it, emboldened by the favor of the great earl and his brilliant nephew, ambitious to be a man of consequence, stands the youthful author of the *Shepheards Calender*. He is a disciple of Chaucer. Like Wyatt with his fable of town and country mice, also told in Chaucerian fashion, the new poet has in mind a tale of a fox and an ape. Perhaps it is already written in part when in this crisis it occurs to him to treat in allegorical fashion this *Æsopian* court, in order to show the danger threatening the Queen and his patron. *Mother Hubberds Tale* is the result.

### III.

The facts are these: *Mother Hubberds Tale* was published in 1591, but the dedication states that it had been "long sithens composed in the raw conceipt" of youth. There is evidence that Spenser got into trouble about it, and that it was "called in." But in 1591 it appeared in the volume of "Complaints," and there is no indication that this volume was criticized. The water must, therefore, have become luke-warm by 1591. It seems to me possible to show now just what its temperature was when the poem first saw the light.

The conventional view is that Spenser's trouble arose from the fact that he attacked Burghley, and that the reason for this attack lay in Burghley's failure to appreciate the talents of the young poet.<sup>1</sup> But a moment's consideration must

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Grosart, I, p. 82, where Bacon is mentioned as another example of a "forward youth" whom Burghley "as was his mode" wished

show the absurdity of this view. Can we conceive that a young and ambitious man, no matter if disappointed over some prospective position, would vent his feelings by writing a vitriolic attack upon a man so powerful as Burghley? He may have done so in 1591; indeed the picture was in all probability retouched at that time. But the man who wrote so cautiously about offending great personages as Spenser did in his letter of October fifth to Harvey, would not have committed suicide by such an attack on Burghley in 1579, unless he had some other motive than disappointed ambition, or was playing for a greater stake. We must, therefore, either suppose that in its first form the *Tale* was a harmless adaptation of Renardic material, afterwards retouched into a severe attack upon Burghley, or that there were things in the early version which cost Spenser dear. The first of these views is untenable, for the trouble antedated 1591. It is needful to ascertain just what there was, in the first draft, to give offence.

The two main incidents in *Mother Hubberds Tale* constitute an allegory of the court in which the courtiers are animals. The relation between these two passages is somewhat perplexing. In the first, the fox and the ape, having tried various employments without success, meet the mule, and are directed by him to the Court, where, they are told, they will reap a rich reward if they follow a crafty course. They take the mule's advice, and the ape assumes the airs of "some great Magnifico," and "boldlie doth amongst the boldest go." Reynold, his man, spreads the impression that his master is a powerful lord, and for a time they have everything their own way. Incidentally we have a) the

to "keep down." Grosart refers the passage about Leicester's quarrel with the Queen to her discovery of his marriage, but quotes Camden, not noting that Elizabeth got her knowledge from Simier (p. 83). But this, as will appear presently, is not without significance.

reference to Leicester's marriage ; *b*) the description of the perfect courtier ; *c*) the description of the foreign adventurer and his false arts ; *d*) the bitter passage on suitors' delays. At length they are discovered, and are compelled to quit the Court. In the second episode, which immediately follows, we are told that after long wandering they come to the forest where the lion lies sleeping, his crown and sceptre beside him. The ape is afraid, and turns to flee, but the fox tells him that here is the chance of their lives. "Scarce could the ape yet speake, so did he quake"; but he asks the fox to explain himself. After a prolonged debate, the ape agrees to assume the sceptre, "yet faintly goes into his worke to enter," being "afraid of everie leafe." He goes on tiptoe, but he is "stryfull and ambitious," while the fox is "guilefull, and most covetous." The fox agrees that the ape shall be king, "Upon condition, that ye ruled bee In all affaires, and counselled by mee." Then they proceed to the Court. There is significance in the statement that the ape-king protected himself by appointing "a warlike equipage Of foraine beasts, not in the forest bred." The fox enlarged his private treasures, kept charge of all offices and leases, sold justice ; he fed his cubs "with fat of all the soyle," and loaded them with lordships ; he violated all laws, "though not with violence"; his "clove was care of thrift, and husbandry." So they ruled, till one day high Jove saw, and sent the son of Maia to awaken the rightful sovereign from sleep. The lion rushed to the Court, slew "those warders strange," tried the fox, but let him go free, and ordered that the ape should lose his tail and half his ears.

That the second of these episodes is clearly an after-thought, and not a part of the original plan is, I think, evident. In the first place, the second story is not characteristic of those forms of the *Renard* cycle which

Spenser seems to have used.<sup>1</sup> Again, the two courts are not the same, nor is the allegory. The first story is a general satire on court life, such as we find in Wyatt, and frequently in sixteenth-century literature in England and on the continent. The theme is at base a familiar incident in the *Renard* stories, with certain conventional Renaissance accretions, such as the contrast between the noble courtier and the base, and the satire on suitors' delays. Very probably this passage was retouched *ca.* 1591, after Spenser had had an experience he surely could not have met in 1579; but this has nothing to do with the fundamental relationship between the two stories. The second incident, on the other hand, is more specific; the allegory is the prominent element; the conception of a court of beasts is stressed; the general satire less evident. Moreover, the characterization is utterly different. Passing by the fact that the lion in the first incident is a courtier, in the second the king, we find that the ape is not the same in the two stories. In the first, he is bold and confident; in the second, he is weak, cowardly, completely the tool of the powerful fox. To this point, which is important, add that the ape-king protects himself by a guard of "foreign" beasts, and the conclusion is irresistible.

In the second story the ape is Simier, or possibly Simier plus Alençon; the fox is Burghley; the lion, or sovereign, is Elizabeth. The purpose of the allegory is to show how a combination between Burghley and the French favorites threatens the Queen, who is unconscious of her peril. If the combination succeeds, Burghley, the fox, will really rule the weak king-consort who has no right to the throne, and who surrounds himself with Frenchmen, foreign beasts, while he and the fox plunder the country, subvert religion,

<sup>1</sup>On the relations of *M. H. T.* to the *Renard* cycle, see my discussion in *Modern Philology*, January, 1905.

virtually depose the rightful sovereign, and despoil the native beasts.

Reviewing the main points in the argument, we have seen that Burghley and Leicester, rivals always, have special interest in this marriage; Burghley being popularly credited with favoring the match, employing fox-like methods, seemingly innocent and caring only for "thrift" and "husbandry," while in reality seeking to make himself powerful at the expense of Leicester.<sup>1</sup> We have seen that the Queen in the winter of 1579-80 was blind to what the Puritans regarded as a national peril, being completely infatuated with her dissolute and effeminate admirers. We have seen that there was a wide-spread fiction making the courtiers animals and the court an assembly of beasts,—a beast-fable in application, appealing to the Elizabethan fondness for such allegories. With all this Spenser was familiar at first hand.<sup>2</sup> He was in the service of Leicester, and at the very time of the crisis, in early October, was expecting to be sent on a mission for him. His patron, therefore, who had everything to lose by this marriage, since Burghley and not Leicester would rule the French favorites, should be warned of the danger; perhaps the Queen herself should be warned. So Spenser takes his imitation of Chaucer, written perhaps not long before, applies the beast-allegory to the crisis among Elizabeth's beasts, and with a daring not less great than Sidney's own, speaks his mind. Here we have reason

<sup>1</sup> Mendoza wrote, 8 April, 1579, that Burghley was not so much opposed to the match as formerly, but that he suspects the reason lies in the desire of Burghley and Sussex to bring about the fall of Leicester (cited by Hume, *The Great Lord Burghley*, p. 330, n. 1). In the following March, Leicester, out of favor, told Mendoza that his enemies were plotting the marriage only to spite him (*ib.*, p. 340).

<sup>2</sup> It is said that Stubbs was well acquainted with Spenser. Moreover, Spenser and Sidney were much in each other's company, and at Leicester House, during this time.

for the traditional enmity of Burghley ; we have also reason for Spenser's being shipped to Ireland the following summer ; we have the grounds on which the poem was "called in." Spenser was ambitious to succeed as Sidney was succeeding ; his literary talents were to be a means for advancing him in the service of the powerful earl ; at the same time he spoke sincerely the astonishment and terror of Englishmen at the imminence of the monstrous foreign alliance, to the dangers of which the Queen seemed through her passion utterly blind.

More subtle than the vigorous denunciations of Stubbs and the Puritan pulpits, *Mother Hubberds Tale* is not less daring. If it lacks the manly frankness of Sidney's famous letter, it has the same aim. Perhaps Spenser's motive was less pure, for he wished to serve Leicester and thereby advance himself ; but there is no harm in a young man's seeking preferment through making himself honorably useful ; and the ring of conviction, the sureness of touch which makes this satire a masterpiece, is proof of sincerity. Spenser allowed the caution revealed in his October letter to be overcome by the crisis. The whole episode has that touch of the dramatic so characteristic of the times, not less interesting in that Spenser was not to be one of those who had prominent places among the *dramatis personæ*. It meant success, or exile : he played for a high stake, and he lost.

Some minor pieces of evidence deepen the impression that the *Tale* belongs to the year 1579-80. One of these is the prevalence of the Plague in both France and England during that period, and it will be remembered that the *Tale* makes reference to such a visitation.<sup>1</sup> Again, the

<sup>1</sup> References to the Plague are numerous at this time. Sir William Fleetwood, Recorder of London, writes to Burghley in October, 1578, that he has been in Buckinghamshire since Michaelmas because he was troubled every day with such as came having plague sores about them, or being sent

entire poem reflects the hatred of French gallantry and intrigue especially characteristic of these years. Simier is said to have turned the Queen's thoughts aside from topics that might awaken her ambition, "disposing her to listen rather to tales of gallantry and such conversation as might engage her affections."<sup>1</sup> The character of Alençon, as summarized by his sister, is precisely that of the ape; "if fraud and infidelity had been banished from the earth, there was in him a stock sufficient of both from which it might have been replenished."<sup>2</sup> In her Progress of 1578, the Queen was attended by a number of young Frenchmen, whom the English called in derision "Monsieurs Youths."<sup>3</sup> All this is reflected in Spenser's poem. Finally, direct evidence is supplied by the well-known reference to Leicester's marriage, ("but his late chayne his Liege unmeete esteemeth" etc.) which would lose its point had it not been written soon after Simier revealed the fact of this marriage, in 1579. The allusion is capitally adapted to a poem designed to rouse the earl to greater zeal in opposing the wiles of the ape who had got him into such trouble.

With the later history of *Mother Hubberds Tale* we are

by the Lords to places where he found dead corpses under the tables, which surely did greatly amaze him (*Hatfield House*, II, p. 222, no. 660). Letters from Paris in 1579-80 report that all study has ceased and friends from England are advised not to travel; importations of certain goods from France to England were forbidden (*Cal. State Papers, Eliz. Domestic*, I, p. 683). Other letters appeal for aid, since the dearth of all things, due to the Plague, renders the need extreme (*State Papers, Eliz.*, I, p. 635). Additional instances might be cited.

<sup>1</sup> Nares, III, p. 164 and note. This is closely parallel to a passage in *M. H. T.* describing the arts of the false courtier. Ample illustrations might be drawn, if necessary, from the extraordinary letters to and from the Queen.

<sup>2</sup> Nares, III, p. 183.

<sup>3</sup> Topcliff to the Earl of Shrewsbury; cited by Nares, III, pp. 109, 113, 114.

not now concerned. It is worth noting, however, that when it was published in the volume of *Complaints* (1591), Burghley was very unpopular. The quarrels between the Puritans and the Catholics, the growing infirmities of age, the war with Essex over the appointment of Sir Robert Cecil to the Privy Council and later to the secretaryship left vacant by Walsingham's death, and the growing influence of Ralegh with the Queen, are examples of the troubles he met.<sup>1</sup> Spenser was intimate with both Essex and Ralegh, and had been disappointed of advancement; the complimentary sonnet prefixed to the *Faerie Queene* in 1590 had failed to bring results. The *Tale*, as revised, reflects some of the poet's new resentment, as in the passage wherein the fox is made to prefer his own cubs for important offices, a palpable reference to the quarrel over Sir Robert's advancement. Another allusion to the same quarrel with Essex and Ralegh is in the *Ruins of Time*.<sup>2</sup> In 1592 a deposition was made in which it was said that "England was governed by the Machiavellian policy of those who would be kings and whom it is time were cut off."<sup>3</sup> Trouble arose over the discovery that Burghley had farmed the customs;<sup>4</sup> and frequent complaints against him were lodged with the Queen. Thus we can understand how Spenser's own disappointed hopes, together with Burghley's troubles with Essex and Ralegh and the criticism directed against him

<sup>1</sup> See Hume, *The Great Lord Burghley*, pp. 444-450, with the notes.

<sup>2</sup> "O grief of griefs! O gall of all good hearts!  
To see that virtue should despised be  
Of him that first was raised for virtuous parts,  
And now broad spreading like an aged tree,  
Lets none shoot up that nigh him planted be."

<sup>3</sup> Cited by Hume, p. 456.

<sup>4</sup> Nares, III, pp. 372-3.

from other sources, should give point to a revised edition of the *Tale* in 1591. In 1579, however, Spenser's attack was not personal; it reflected the popular idea that Burghley was favoring the French marriage in order that he might himself increase his power and ruin Leicester; Spenser was in the employ of the earl and sought to do him service. Perhaps he even feared that Leicester would be blinded to the consequences of the alliance.

The significance of *Mother Hubberds Tale*, therefore, proceeds 1) from the fact that Spenser was elated because of his new intimacy with Leicester, Sidney, and Dyer, and his evident purpose to be a man of action as well as a poet; 2) from the fact that the Queen's court was regarded as an assembly of beasts, each courtier being given a name as in the *Renard* cycle of tales; 3) from the fact that fox and ape, Burghley and Simier and Alençon, seemed on the point of succeeding in their supposed attempt to gain control, this being possible because of the blindness of the Queen through her infatuation; and 4) from Spenser's attempt to second Sidney and other Puritans in voicing the horror of the people and warning Leicester, as the head of the Puritan party, to prevent the alliance from being consummated. For such a purpose the allegory was admirably suited. It is not necessary to consider the poem as a whole to have been written with this purpose in view. The indications are to the contrary. The presence of two episodes dealing with court life, different, even contradictory in part, gives reason to suppose that the allegory of the usurpation was an after-thought. It is this that refers to the Alençon intrigue. But even if the poem was written at one time, no one who is familiar with Spenser's methods in allegory will be troubled by the fact that the earlier incidents in the story do not refer to this intrigue; such changes and additions are common in the *Faerie Queene*. The *Tale* is primarily a Chau-

cerian story based on the Renard cycle, with modifications frequently met in the literature of the Renaissance. But the story of the usurpation, the satire on gallantry, and the reference to Leicester's marriage, these have to do with the intrigue that stirred England to the depths in 1579-80, and these fix the date of the *Tale*.

#### IV.

We have now to consider the consequences of Spenser's daring. It should be remembered that in this year the Queen was for the first time personally unpopular. The marriage negotiations called forth protests that were so bold as to be dangerous. I have referred to the book by Stubbs and to his punishment. In the *State Papers* is a circular from the Council to the Bishops, dated October 5, 1579,—the date of Spenser's letter, and the time when the Council was holding daily sessions to consider the marriage. This circular gave notice that the seditious suggestions in the book called *The Gaping Gulph* were without foundation, and that special noted preachers should declare the same to the people.<sup>1</sup> Even more interesting is Sidney's connection with the affair. His letter was written in January, 1580, and states his objections to the marriage, mainly on religious grounds, thus representing the Puritans. We are told that he was punished for his boldness by several months' exclusion from the Queen's presence,<sup>2</sup> and letters from his friend Languet seem to fear more severe penalties. I have no space to tell of the quarrel between Sidney and Oxford, the sensation of the time.<sup>3</sup> Oxford was compelled

<sup>1</sup> There are eleven copies of this circular in *State Papers*, cxxxii (abstract in *Calendar*, p. 634, nos. 26-36). Some of these are fully signed, some partially, some not signed at all.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Fox Bourne, p. 185.

<sup>3</sup> See the details in Fulke Greville's *Life of Sidney* (1652), Clarendon Press repr. 1907, pp. 63 ff.

to challenge Sidney, but "her Majesties Counsell took notice of the differences," and commanded peace. Oxford, be it remembered, was the cowardly son-in-law of Burghley. In view of Spenser's relations with Sidney at this time, the incident is highly significant; Sidney opposed the marriage, and Oxford took advantage of his being out of favor with the Queen to insult him.

Leicester, too, had his troubles. Burghley and Sussex favored the marriage. There is proof that when, in 1580, Leicester had dealings with Condé, the object being to form a Spanish alliance against France, Burghley deliberately incited the fiery Sussex to quarrel with Leicester. He wrote that he came upon Condé and the earl in an important conference with the Queen. Burghley himself found the door shut against him. The wily Lord Treasurer expressed no personal grievance at the affront, but he knew his man.<sup>1</sup> When the marriage apparently fell through, in 1581, Sussex threw all the blame on Leicester and tried to arouse the anger of the French against him. Walsingham writes of the great quarrel between the two earls, and says that the Queen commanded both to keep their chambers on penalty of commitment. They pretended to be friends, but she kept them waiting for days before they were forgiven.<sup>2</sup> More direct evidence is found in a letter to Burghley of July 20, 1580, in which Leicester complains that he has found less of her Majesty's wonted favors. He gives particulars of his suits to her for more lands, which had been stayed, and he states that the Queen used "very hard terms" to him. He pleads in this letter for a continuance of Burghley's friendship. Interesting further evidence of the methods by which he sought to ingratiate himself with

<sup>1</sup> See the letter, and the fiery reply of Sussex in *Halford House*, II, p. 329.

<sup>2</sup> *Cal. State Papers*, II, p. 22.

Burghley is found in a letter in which Burghley thanks him for the gift of a fine hound,—“she maketh my huntyng very certen.”<sup>1</sup>

Now if we combine with this evidence as to Sidney’s connection with the affair during the few months following October, 1579, and Leicester’s troubles with the Queen, Burghley, and Sussex, the fact that *Mother Hubberds Tale* was “called in” and that in the next summer Spenser was sent to Ireland, the case seems clear. We may note that in December, 1580, Alençon writes that he has heard that several individuals in court are out of favor because of their disaffection to him, and begs that they may not be ill-used on his account.<sup>2</sup> And there is Hatton’s servile letter of September, 1580, in which he tells of receiving the Queen’s most gracious letter on his knees, praises the cunning of her style of writing as exceeding all the eloquence of the world, and closes with the comforting assurance that having made long war against love and ambition, it is now more than time to yield.<sup>3</sup> The draft of an Act against slanderous words and rumors against the Queen’s Majesty, found early in 1581,<sup>4</sup> indicates the stern measures thought necessary. It would be easy to make the case stronger, but enough has surely been said to prove that Leicester’s position in 1580 was particularly critical ; that he was made a scape-goat for the failure of the marriage, as well as compelled to suffer the

<sup>1</sup> These two letters are in *State Papers, Domestic*, 1580 (Cal. I, pp. 666 and 672).

<sup>2</sup> *Hatfield House*, II, p. 355 (no. 909).

<sup>3</sup> *Calendar, State Papers*, I, 677. But that Hatton was insincere is shown by the fact that when, early in 1582, Leicester was forced to accompany Alençon to Brabant, the “sheep” promptly reported a chance remark of the Queen’s, with the result that Leicester came post-haste to England, to be called a knave and a traitor for his pains.

<sup>4</sup> *Calendar*, II, p. 3.

resentment of the Queen.<sup>1</sup> Much of this resentment was due to the activities of Leicester's Puritan allies, among whom was Spenser, and one can hardly doubt that *Mother Hubberds Tale* was one of the slanderous documents to which objection was made.

Thus one realizes that the over-zealous Spenser cannot have been so valued by his patron as he had hoped in the preceding October. Probably no one was more thankful than the earl that in the summer of 1580 Lord Grey was appointed to Ireland, was in need of a secretary, and was willing to take the young poet. Grey was himself *persona non grata*; for he had been suspected of sympathy with the ill-fated Duke of Norfolk. Ireland, Brabant, the Low Countries, these were Siberias to which over-zealous persons might be sent if needful. Leicester, Ralegh, Grey, even Sidney were subjected to this "cooling card"; Spenser was in distinguished company.

## V.

If this interpretation be accepted, that Leicester, finding himself in a tight place, sacrificed his young admirer as well as a fine hound to propitiate angry deities, we can now explain another perplexing problem in Spenser's work. In few passages in the entire body of his poetry does Spenser speak so bitterly as in the sonnet addressed to Leicester at the beginning of *Virgils Gnat*. The lines have a fierce repression that suggests Milton :

<sup>1</sup> For additional indication of how Leicester was looked upon by the Puritans as their one hope, see the letter to him from Sir Francis Knollys, June, 1580, objecting fiercely to the proposed triumph of Catholicism, plotted out by the *serpentine subtlety* of the Queen Mother's head (*Calendar*, I, p. 658).

“Wrong'd yet not daring to expresse my paine,  
To you (great Lord) the causer of my care,  
In clowdie teares my case I thus complaine  
Unto thyselfe, that onelye privie are.”

The poem is marked “Long since dedicated to the most noble and excellent Lord, the Earle of Leicester, late deceased.” There can be no doubt that the dedicatory sonnet was written before the earl's death (1588). There can also be no doubt that the reference in the sonnet, as well as the story of the poem itself, is to *Mother Hubberds Tale* and to the punishment which Spenser suffered therefor. It will be remembered that the gnat (Spenser) does the shepherd (Leicester) a service by *warning him of the snake* (the Alençon marriage).<sup>1</sup> He is crushed, and is carried into a “waste wilderness” (Ireland). “Ay me!” he says, “that thankes so much should faile of meede :

“For that I thee restor'd to life againe . . .  
Where then is now the guerdon of my paine?  
Where the reward of my so piteous deed?  
The praise of pitie vanisht is in vaine,  
And th' antique faith of Justice long agone  
Out of the land is fled away and gone.”

More directly he says,

“I saw another's fate approaching fast,  
And left mine owne his safetie to tender ;  
Into the same mishap I now am cast.”

Other exiles return, but

“I, poore wretch, am forced to retourne  
To the sad lakes.”

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<sup>1</sup> I hardly dare go so far as to suggest that even the snake recalls the name by which Catherine was known: “Mad. la Serpente”; yet it seems not impossible. Of course Spenser is following the pseudo-Virgilian *Culex*.

Line after line might be quoted to the same effect: the poet, exiled to Ireland because of the service he rendered his patron, complains of the injustice of his hard lot. That service was the warning which *Mother Hubberds Tale* conveyed. Thus we are able not only to explain the sonnet prefixed to *Virgils Gnat* and the allegory of the poem itself, but also to date that poem at least approximately. Spenser wrote it after he had been long enough in Ireland to give up all hope but the hope that Leicester might bring him back. That must have been prior to September, 1585, when Leicester was appointed to the command in the States and got himself into the difficulty from which he was never fully released until his death in 1588. But Spenser, having failed before, dared not send the poem, and it remained in manuscript until, with the first cause, the *Tale* itself, it was printed in the volume of 1591. The two poems, taken together, give the history of that mistake of overboldness which Spenser wished so pathetically, in his letter to Harvey, to avoid. But the part he played in it all, while an error in judgment, is not discreditable, and his complaint, in *Virgils Gnat*, is dignified and manly.

## VI.

Several other subjects suggest themselves, among them a reconstruction of the history of Spenser's relations to Burghley. It would have been more politic had Spenser attached himself to the great Lord Treasurer rather than to his rivals. But none understood Burghley, in that day, except Elizabeth. He used men as tools to further his own ends; he played a middle course; fox-like, his strategy seemed insincere and Machiavellian. He had attacks of gout or busied himself about other affairs, when exigency required. We can realize, now, that he was not altogether selfish, and that much of his

apparent unscrupulousness was due to his desire to attain great ends which could be attained only by unscrupulous means. Leicester was able, but reckless; lacking true patriotism, he was swayed by his passion for the Queen. But he allied himself openly with the Puritans; to them he was a great leader, and he attached to himself by this means such high-souled but impractical men as Sidney and Spenser. Both paid dearly for their connection with the earl. One thing is clear: whatever animosity against Burghley was expressed in the original form of *Mother Hubberds Tale*, was due to other than selfish pettishness because Spenser's talents were not appreciated. The idea that at the early time when the *Tale* was first written, and with matters of such weight engaging his attention elsewhere, Burghley was meanly jealous of Spenser because he was brilliant and promising, is too absurd to be longer maintained. Admirers of Spenser's poetry are apt to exaggerate his importance in other respects. Politically he was a very small person indeed; his image of the gnat is pathetically accurate.

The fitting close of this discussion of Spenser's connection with Leicester is found in that later version of the earl's marriage put in the *Faerie Queene*. Belphebe (Elizabeth) saves Timias (Leicester) but does not realize his love for her.<sup>1</sup> Afterwards, however, she sees him kissing Amoret (The Countess of Essex), and becomes very angry. He pursues her, vainly; goes into retirement; yields to immeasurable grief. The Dove sees him with the ruby and a little golden chain, makes peace between them and they are happy.<sup>2</sup> The allegory does not end in marriage, or in love in the conventional sense; it represents knightly service. Here is a charming picture of the quarrel of 1579, softened by time,

<sup>1</sup> *F. Q.* III, v, 50.

<sup>2</sup> *F. Q.* IV, vii, 35-47; viii, 1 ff.

and presenting in the happiest light the attachment of the earl for his Queen. One wishes that Leicester might have seen it before the time, four days before he died, when he wrote that message on which Elizabeth penned the words, "His last letter."

In this discussion I have sought to show that it was Spenser's connection with Leicester which caused his exile to Ireland, and that this connection led him to write at least the portion of *Mother Hubberds Tale* which gave such offence, the attack on Burghley being due not to personal grievance, but to Spenser's desire to defend his patron and to aid the Puritans. This has made it possible to offer an explanation of the allegory in the *Tale* and in *Virgils Gnat*, and to suggest dates for these poems. All this throws additional light upon the critical year 1579-80, and a study of the October letter to Harvey confirms the impression that at this time Spenser had plans for his life which, if carried through, would have made serious differences in his later work. For the history of English literature it is highly fortunate that the young poet was not plunged into the maelstrom of political life as were Sidney and Ralegh. Spenser himself was bitterly disappointed; he hoped to be an important figure in his own time. The incident is one of many to prove that the course of a man's life may have a significance quite at variance with his plans for himself.

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